

Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings: An Amdo Tibetan New Year, Klu thar rgyal's meticulously detailed exploration of Lo sar is comparable to a lively reality program focused on a Tibetan sheep-herding community in a semi-arid region of China's northwest Qinghai Province where modernity and tradition interact in a socially dynamic setting. Emphasizing transitions between old and new ways of life and thought, this young Tibetan author documents his own family's and community's responsibilities during the New Year Lo sar period. From a multi-day series of events, including parties, rituals, and weddings, Klu thar rgyal chooses weddings to illustrate a social-economic dynamic of the cultural integration of tradition and the "fashionable and modern." Mundane daily chores are the essence of this book. It strives to depict the totality of observational focus, introducing essential circumstances of real life and allowing readers to judge and interpret the multiple social aspects of these chores and interactions. For example, the writer's mother's painstaking housework, concern for the family's livestock, and less-than-riveting conversation portray authentic life. The book communicates more - gender inequality and education levels - but without judgment or interpretation. Moreover, the eighty-five captioned photographs offer a graphic visual representation of the content, embedding readers in reality rather than the perhaps romanticized imaginary images. Essential reading for learning more about contemporary Tibetan society as it transitions from rural to urban, from mobile pastoralism to a settled existence, and the impacts of ecological enclosure and compulsory education.

-Gengqiu Gelai (Konchok Gelek,
Dkon mchog dge legs འཇམ་དཔལ་འཇམ་ལོ་ཤར་པ་) *University of Zurich*

Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings: An Amdo Tibetan New Year is an intimate, exceptionally thorough Tibetan New Year study, providing a day-by-day description of the 2018 Tibetan New Year in the author's pastoral home community in Mang ra (Guinan) County in the southeast of Qinghai Province, PR China. Photographs of people, places, and activities further add to the book's value, providing materials for research analysis and comparison with Lo sar activities in other areas. Klu thar rgyal provides researchers with an exemplary model of recording and presenting their home community's cultural manifestations with photos, illustrations, personal involvement, and discussion.

-Tshe dbang rdo rje འཇམ་དཔལ་འཇམ་ལོ་ཤར་པ་ (Caixiangduojie 才祥多吉)
Qinghai Normal University འཇམ་དཔལ་འཇམ་ལོ་ཤར་པ་

Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings: An Amdo Tibetan New Year is an important book and the most detailed Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year' study in any language to date. The author, Klu thar rgyal, a native of Amdo Mtsho lho, conducted a longitudinal study in his home community through interviews, careful observations, richly descriptive narratives, insider perspectives and memories, and powerful images. Notably, the author's qualitative research approach captures details often ignored in the furtherance of research and academic goals. This ethnographic work's richness adds to the array of English-language Tibetan studies and is of immense value to enlivening discussion, particularly among Tibetan readers and Western scholars. Significantly, it challenges readers to reflect on how this Tibetan New Year differs from other Lo sar practices in the vast Tibetosphere. How can arts and media be used to record Tibetan observations? How would you (the Tibetan reader) outline Lo sar for your local community?

-Rinchen Khar (Rin chen mkhar འཇམ་དཔལ་འཇམ་ལོ་ཤར་པ་)
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

This collection of intertwined narratives, images, and commentary is essential for those interested in Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year' culture and Amdo Tibetan herding communities in

particular. This work speaks to the lack of nuanced, thorough studies of Amdo Lo sar by local Tibetans. The changes and continuities experienced by herders during Lo sar celebrations and practices reflect daily life, providing powerful insight into the broader socio-economic context of their livelihoods.

-Tshe dpal rdo rje བོད་པ་རྩོམ་པ་པོ་ལྷོ་ཁྱེད་སྐྱུ་ལྷོ་ཁྱེད་སྐྱུ་ *University of Canterbury*

Klu thar rgyal, a Tibetan raised in his natal herding community and now seeking opportunity in a cosmopolitan city, presents an in-depth description of an Amdo Lo sar, reflecting the essential nature of this traditional festival. Aware of this festival's imminent disappearance as it encounters economic transformation, coupled with his well-informed perspectives on local life, the author admirably achieves his objective - an exceptionally informed treatment of local Tibetan life in transition.

-Dpal ldan bkra shis བོད་སྐད་ཀྱི་ཡི་གེ་ཨུམ་བོ་སྐད་ཀྱི་ཡི་གེ་ Humboldt University zu Berlin

Klu thar rgyal provides intimate, firsthand accounts of an Amdo herding community's Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year' and wedding traditions. Careful and precise recording of daily events, experiences before and during Lo sar, and examination of cultural change make this unique text extremely valuable.

-Nyangchak (Snying lcags rgyal སྟིང་ལགས་རྒྱལ་)

Klu thar rgyal's superb autoethnographic account is a detailed reconstruction of his family's Lo sar celebration in an Amdo Tibetan herding community. Although claiming to be only a record of his family's Lo sar activities based on his fieldwork in his natal community in 2018, it is much more with Klu thar rgyal bringing a better appreciation of how Lo sar observations have evolved. In the grip of ongoing transformative social processes since the late 1990s, he chronicles clan-based community life held together by its integrative system of beliefs and practices. Beyond merely portraying one family's Lo sar, this account allows readers to better understand how Tibetan New Year gatherings involve various participation levels, offering a window into the local community's social, religious, and economic life. This series of narratives featuring Klu thar rgyal and community members, along with excellent photographs, present vivid personal accounts, memories, and hopes for the future. As readers, we absorb and remake our memories of people, place, and events, hoping for their and our futures.

-Rin chen rdo rje འཇིགས་རྒྱུ་བློ་བྟན་པ་ལྷན་ཁག་ Lanchow University

In this essential, detailed record of a Tibetan New Year in a rural pastoral community of Amdo, Klu thar rgyal gives a comprehensive account of the most important local annual festival in diary format, beginning several days before the festival until the fifteenth day of the first lunar month - the last day of the New Year period. Using a broad lens, he presents ethnographic information, including relatives' and friends' social ties, a marriage, a death, a funeral, religious activities, food, housing, horseraces, and his mother's divination practices. Valuably, the writer records social changes and locals' use of electricity, television, smartphones, and social media. Rapid social change inevitably brings loss to traditional lifestyles and values, about which the author expresses concern and disappointment.

-Kelsang Norbu (Gesang Nuobu, Skal bzang nor bu གསང་ལྷུ་སཀལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ་)

Klu thar rgyal's insider, very personal study of Lo sar/Tibetan New Year in the Amdo herding community of Tsha nag in Mtsho lho is an enjoyable, highly informative read of this critically important Tibetan celebration. Through eating, drinking, and laughing; family reunions; friendships renewed between relatives and community members via reciprocal exchanges of Lo sar gifts; customs of seniority and courtesy; marriage rituals and festivities; religious ceremonies; horse races; illness and hospitalization; local pilgrimages; life on the pastures and in resettled areas; preparing, presenting, and concluding Lo sar; the impact of social media -

particularly WeChat - on Lo sar; and more we, the readers, are immersed in the author's world. Like other Tibetan communities, this small, relatively remote community is experiencing profound alterations in transportation and communication with a profound impact on the local people and traditions, including Lo sar. This is essential reading for anyone interested in Tibetan life in the second decade of the twenty-first century, made even more valuable by its numerous photographs.

-Rigdrol Jikar (Rig grol རིག་གྲོ།), *Victoria University, Australia*

This account provides unique insights into the social-cultural structures effectively connecting an Amdo Tibetan herding family with its community and religious institutions through detailed descriptions of the family's New Year activities over twenty days. The local Buddhist-centered culture resonates to some extent with my own Namuyi Tibetan New Year in terms of cleaning rituals and other preparations, visiting relatives with certain types of meat, and so on. This raises the question of why these two groups share many similarities, though they are geographically, culturally, and linguistically different? Notably, the author provides examples of how the community's social-cultural configurations are in the process of reformulation as new technology is introduced locally.

-Li Jianfu (Libu Lakhi, Zla ba bstan 'dzin རྩ་བ་བསྐྱེད་པོ།),
Qinghai Normal University རྒྱལ་ཁོངས་སྐད་སྐོར་སློབ་ཆེན་ལུགས་སྐྱོང་སློབ་ཁྱེད་

Detail matters. Culture lives in the rhythms of everyday life and individual practice. Klu thar rgyal's carefully described personal experiences and family relations provide an in-depth account of an Amdo Tibetan New Year, focusing on critical elements such as visiting relatives and community members, gift exchange, hospitality, wedding ceremonies, and religious activities. With discussion of rapid change currently underway in Tibetan New Year activities, Klu thar rgyal's *Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings* is an indispensable resource for those interested in the Tibetan New Year and an excellent contribution to Tibetan Studies.

-Sangs rgyas bkra shis རྩ་བ་ལྷན་པོ། *University of Colorado Boulder*

Hopes, Gatherings, and New Beginnings: An Amdo Tibetan New Year is a richly detailed and photographically illustrated account of Lo sar 'Tibetan New Year'. Painstaking participant observation and in-depth interviews provide insights into the community's rapid changes, particularly with Lo sar and weddings. Through careful ethnographical analysis, Klu thar rgyal enlightens readers about how smartphones, electricity, and internet access have affected, altered, and weakened Tibetan traditional festivals and rituals. This significant contribution to Tibetan studies provides invaluable insights into this community and its people.

-Duojie Zhaxi (Rdo rje bkra shis ར་དོ་རྟེ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་པོ།) *Qinghai Minzu University*

"Platters of stacked food for treating guests during the Lunar New Year and weddings" is mentioned several times, reminding me of "We have placed a mountain of bread and meat before the maternal uncle and guests and offered a sea of liquor and tea to the guests" heard at Huzhu Mongghul (Tu, Monguor) weddings. This confirms similar ways of entertaining guests in Tibetan and Mongghul communities at weddings and when receiving many guests. Klu thar rgyal offers readers a vivid description of a 2018 Lo sar in his home herding community in today's Guinan County, Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, China. A diary format provides a rich tapestry of memories, tribes, stories about and experiences of the author's family and community, folk ideas, behaviors, food, clothing, adornments, visits to relatives and community members, purchasing items from shops, house-cleaning, frying and

baking bread, making Tibetan cakes, holding religious rites, mountain deity altars, weddings, pilgrimages, horseraces, chats, humor, taboos, customs, singing, eating, and drinking during the six days before Lo sar until the fifteenth day of the New Year of 2018.

"Mother served the guests her best, but after they left, Mother filled the guests' bowls with ashes and did not touch them for several days to avoid disease and evil." Again, this resonates with Mongghul historical practice to avoid disease and evil brought by guests or strangers. This was particularly true for children considered weak and who easily fell ill at a time when high-quality health care was lacking. In contrast, today's Mongghul youth would find such behavior astonishing.

"If we did this, our family would have no conflicts in the coming year. We believed this and tried our best to be nice to each other. Mother would forgive us no matter what bad things we did on these days." Mongghul practice this, particularly on New Year's Eve and the next three days. Family members do their best to preserve harmony and to be kind to each other. Scolding and bickering are avoided for fear misfortune will come to the family.

Dramatic change is accelerating in this herding community as it encounters rapid globalization, modernization, and cultural transformation through WeChat, vehicles, electrical appliances and devices, new clothing trends, modern housing, and new lifeways. The young Tibetan scholar, Klu thar rgyal, has done impressive work in preserving a record of his pastoral community's New Year in 2018 at a time when local young people increasingly leave the pastures for work in urban areas that attract with the dazzling promise of modern lifestyles, gaiety, and splendor, and easy-to-find jobs that regularly pay, creating new social and cultural situations. We eagerly await more of Klu thar rgyal's valuable writings that we and later generations will read, allowing reflection, comparison, and recollection of what grassland culture was in the early twenty-first century.

-Limusishiden, Qinghai University Affiliated Hospital

ACCLAIM

Compelling history in its careful treatment of the perplexing search for "manhood," social placement and meaning, and religious practice and belief - particularly *lha pa* 'spirit mediums' - gives great value to Klu thar rgyal's grandfather's and great-aunt's meticulous accounts of ordinary life among A mdo tribal herders in the 1929-1958 era. This extraordinary work, packed with tragedy, violence, and the most tender of moments, emphasizes the value of ethnographic work while challenging the mindless embracing of modern transformations. Sketches by the principal informant's grandson, photographs, maps, the author's nuanced interpretations, and provocative insights further enrich this valuable addition to the study of Tibetan nomad life recounted by those who lived it, provoking the question: "What *should* students of the past focus on?"

-Rinchen Khar (Rin chen mkhar རིན་ཆེན་མཁའ་མཚན་) University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Extraordinary memories from ordinary Tibetans living a challenging nomad life south of Qinghai Lake in China provide important supplementary historical accounts missing from mainstream Tibetan and Chinese histories. Events described occurred as power shifted to the Communist Party in Qinghai from the Ma Bufang regime. Tibetologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and novelists *need* to read this book.

-Li Jianfu ལི་ཇུ་འུ་ (Libu Lakhi, Zla ba bstan 'dzin ལྷུ་བཀའ་བླ་མ་བུ་མཚན་འཛུགས་) Qinghai Normal University རྒྱུ་མཚན་གྱི་རྒྱུ་མཚན་

Last Memories gives us entrée into a historical period and region in A mdo rarely featured in written accounts through the life experiences/storytelling of two Mang ra elders. Klu thar rgyal renders his own people's tribal and ancestral history via local voices he trusts and who, in turn, entrust their stories to him. The author's curiosity about his community's past and the narrators' accounts provide a valuable resource for posterity. *Last Memories* fills one of many lacunae toward a clearer understanding of modern A mdo history and culture in general, and Mang ra people's livelihood in particular.

-Choni Namgyal Tsepak (Co ne tshe dpag rnam rgyal རྒྱུ་མཚན་གྱི་རྒྱུ་མཚན་འཛུགས་) Cornell University

Tibetan tribal lives are revealed in memory collections from two narrators in the context of the early twentieth century to 1958 in an A mdo "frontier" area, where government control, including the brutal Ma Family regime, failed to bring law or order. Bandit raids, blood revenge, kinship obligations, and exodus characterize the precarious life of this pastoral, tribal existence. Love, weddings, relationships, marmot hunting, foodways, measures of wealth, illness, and shamanistic rituals detail this presentation of tribal lives. Photographs, maps, and footnotes validate these local accounts compiled and presented by the local author familiar with his home community. Often beyond conventional imagination, *Final Memories* challenges historians to prioritize often impassioned local accounts that offer insight into the past that exist nowhere else.

-Gengqiu Gelai (Konchok Gelek, Dkon mchog dge legs རྒྱུ་མཚན་གྱི་རྒྱུ་མཚན་འཛུགས་) University of Zurich

Klu thar rgyal's powerful presentation of non-fiction life narratives of two elders seizes the reader's attention, vividly illustrating the great transformations occurring in Eastern Tibet in the 1929-1958 period, a time often overlooked in contemporary studies.

-Duo Dala (Stobs stag lha ལྷུ་བཀའ་བླ་མ་བུ་མཚན་འཛུགས་) International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Last Memories presents vivid memoirs of A mdo Tibetan tribal men and women living in the 1930s and into the twenty-first century, chronicling a tumultuous period of social unrest. Richly detailed ethnographic accounts include bandit raids, livestock stealing and revenge, territorial battles, the death of loved ones, and negotiations and compensation stemming from livestock theft and resultant killings. Women's lives include arranged marriage, childbirth, illness, death, and struggles for free love. These life accounts also feature esoteric beliefs and practices such as *sher* rituals to determine guilt or innocence, mountain deity worship, spirit mediums, catching evil spirits in a leather bag to cure ailments, heavy taxation by the Ma warlord

government, conflict with Ma officials, and flight to a neighboring province to avoid taxes and return home; and communal life and class struggles in the 1950s. This valuable oral history of A mdo is essential reading.

-Kelsang Norbu (Gesang Nuobu, Skal bzang nor bu) ཀེས་གསུམ་འཕེལ་པ་ལྷན་པོ་

Few communities on earth have experienced the abrupt, extreme changes Tibetan communities faced in the twentieth century. Thus, the narratives in this extraordinary work on lived experiences of ordinary, individual historical actors are invaluable. Enriching the literature of contemporary Tibetan history, this is a must-read.

-Tshe dpal rdo rje འཕེལ་པ་རྡོ་རྗེ་ University of Canterbury

Colorful prayer flags, mountain ranges where countless sheep and yaks graze, valleys and riverbanks, smoke wafting to the sky from small clusters of black yak-hair tents scattered on the grassland... such quiet, idyllic scenes suggest Tibetan herders on the Plateau grasslands living in legendary Shambala. Eating, herding, shearing sheep, milking, collecting yaks, repairing tents, searching for lovers, treating illness with spirit mediums possessed by mountain deities, weddings, death, and so on reveal a world that is also one of hatred, revenge, cursing practices, bandit raids, lethal gunshots, and banditry among the tribes in the pre-1958 period. Klu thar rgyal's grandfather and great-aunt recount their A mdo Tibetan lives between 1929-1958 in today's Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province. Names of yaks, sheep, and horses are also provided. This impressive work offers valuable insight into traditional Tibetan herding culture.

-Limusishiden, Qinghai University Affiliated Hospital

Last Memories' first-hand stories of the pre-1958 period, narrated by the author's close relatives and skilfully woven together, reflect A mdo Tibetan community existence in regions ruled by feudal and tribal authorities. Tribal norms and customs emerge, presenting a holistic portrayal of life familiar to the ordinary Tibetans who lived it and described it from personal experience. In the second decade of the 21st Century, unprecedented social changes have delegated that world to fading memories. Essential reading for historians, anthropologists, and Tibetan Studies specialists.

-Dpal ldan bkra shis འཕེལ་པ་ལྷན་པོ་འཕེལ་པ་ལྷན་པོ་
Humboldt University zu Berlin

Theft, killing, and revenge were embedded in the lives and culture of Tibetan bandits, not because of poverty but to prove masculinity to "bolster their reputation, prove their bravery, receive more recognition from their home community." Certain bandits "snatched lambs while they were on horseback and put them into their robe pouch." Some Tibetan nomads "burned the surface of the wool off all their lambs while they were alive, to prevent bandits from stealing, killing, and skinning" them. Forced marriage at a young age was common and married women "returned to their natal home only once a year because of the distance and fear of encountering bandits."

Tibetan nomads traveled widely on the back of yaks and horses with their livestock. Little children "were put inside milk churns" on long journeys. New encounters, retelling stories, and bandit attacks were common in Amdo areas where Tibetan elders never ran short of stories to tell. Such narratives are seldom heard today and are on the verge of permanently fading away.

Last Memories gives significant insights into Tibetan nomads' lives during dangerous times. It details arranged marriage, divination, deities, clothing, ornaments, the Tibetan New Year, marmots and pikas, animal naming, livestock tax collection, kidnapping, local justice, rulers, conflicts, revenge, and disease. This invaluable contribution records endangered oral histories of significant times, places, and people that would otherwise go unheard.

-Nyangchakja (Snying lcags rgyal སྐྱེད་ལགས་རྒྱལ་)